

## the small society

by Bill Yates



## No matter what, Utah isn't average

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Anyone who thinks Utah's an "average" state is wrong.

According to "Turn the Hearts, Turn the Minds," a statistical look at Utah's families now through the year 2000, we are either the best or the worst at almost everything we do.

During the recent Governor's Conference on Strengthening the Families, Richard M. Eyre sold copies of a draft report on Utah, compiled in conjunction with a doctor of philosophy and two Utah State University doctoral candidates.

As I watched people queue up to get a copy of the report, I decided there must be a high interest in Utah's standing among other states. So here's a shortened look at the report.

The news seems both good and bad. And it serves to point out the disparity between how we see ourselves and how we really are.

For instance, 83 percent of Utahns think family life is more important today than five years ago. And 89 percent of Utahns surveyed say that a successful life can be defined as having a happy family, compared to 4 percent who believe it's doing well in the world.

But while 79 percent claim they'd like to see a return to a simpler society with less emphasis on material success, less than half (46 percent) of Utahns believe there's a growing trend back to a simpler life. We're a pretty pessimistic group, since 68 percent of the nation thinks life's getting simpler and better.

In the actual 50-state numerical ranking, Utah is dead last in several categories:

Our median age is the youngest, we have the fewest unwed mothers, we consume less alcohol per capita and we spend less on education per student. That's certainly a mixture of good and bad news.

We rank No. 49 when the number of abortions is compared to the number of live births. Only one state has a lower percentage of people over 65. We are 47th in the percent of women under 20 who give birth, in our death rate and in our personal income.

We are also somewhere in the lower 10 states in terms of population density, infant mortality rate, number of welfare recipients as a percent of the population, percent of people who are employed and the number of murders

committed per 100,000 persons.

We take even more first-place honors:

Our households are the largest, we have the most women of child-bearing years who are actually giving birth and the highest percentage of kids both under 5 and 5-17.

We also have more students per teacher, more median years of education and by far the highest number of non-working-age people (both young and old) compared to the working-age population.

Utah takes the No. 2 spot nationally in birth rate, percent of people claiming affiliation with a church and percentage of people over age 25 with a high school diploma. We have the fourth-longest life expectancy, and we are No. 4 in the percentage of income we spend on education.

We make the top 10 in other areas as well: More of our people live in cities than rural areas, a high percentage of Utahns complete college, we have a great voter turnout in presidential elections, we have more millionaires per million residents and more homeowners. We rank eighth in the percentage of our income that pays state and local taxes and in projected population growth between 1980 and 2000.

The report also looks at "an average day in Utah."

It says 46 couples get married and 21 are granted divorces that will affect 23 children.

One infant dies and 12 teenagers become pregnant. Nine teens give birth each day and 11 children are born out of wedlock. Ninety-seven children are born — 12 of them to mothers younger than 18.

Thirteen abortions are performed — three a day on those under age 19. And there's documentation that 18 children are abused and neglected.

As for education, seven students drop out of school every day.

We can't just make decisions and change some of the findings. But there's more bad news and it's a personal choice: 145 people have at least four alcoholic drinks and then drive every day (alcohol and driving kill two people a week).

There's more — a lot more. And, while statistics come and go and aren't always as clearcut as they appear to be, such a look at Utah offers us a chance to see our strengths and weaknesses and possibly to make some changes.

At the very least, we can see where we fit in among our fellow Utahns.



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